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Education News (continued from the Education Net Home Page) **Office in District of Columbia Targets Re-entry and Education**

By Jasper Ormond,
Interim Director, Court Services and Offender
Supervision Agency For the District of Columbia

Last year President Clinton addressed a serious issue that should be a high priority for the residents of the District of Columbia. In support of then-Attorney General Reno's call for increased funding for re-entry programs, he urged Congress to provide \$145 million for innovative initiatives that provide closer supervision of and resources for the nearly 600,000 individuals who are projected to be released from prison this year.

Re-entry is not just the latest buzzword in the field of criminal justice; it is a serious undertaking to ensure that the supervised population does not pose a threat to public safety. Indeed, successful re-entry of offenders is a major challenge facing this nation. As large cadres of ex-offenders begin transitioning from prison back to their families and communities, we need to do all that we can to reduce the likelihood that they will re-offend.

A new federal agency, the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) has assumed responsibility for the successful transition of offenders and defendants into the community in DC. Certified on August 4, 2000, CSOSA is responsible for supervising nearly 30,000 adult pretrial defendants and post-conviction offenders. Many of these individuals were sentenced for crimes involving illegal substances and without targeted interventions most will arrive home with the same problems that got them in trouble in the

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first place.

The nation's prison population, while at an all time high, is resulting in large numbers of ex-offenders returning home to uncertain possibilities. This is a serious public safety issue. National studies indicate that two-thirds of all ex-offenders will be arrested within three years of release. In the District, most parolees re-offend within the first seven months of release. To reduce crime in the city, Chief of Police Charles Ramsey put more police officers on the streets. However, this measure alone, will not be enough to handle the growing population of individuals who might be tempted to recommit crimes. Supervising the men and women under criminal justice control in the District of Columbia is a worthy challenge that requires a holistic, community-based approach.

DC Program To Improve Transition

The successful integration of offenders into communities through increased accountability and social support is the hallmark of CSOSA's Re-Entry System. Prior to the establishment of CSOSA in 1997, offenders incarcerated in the District of Columbia's (DC) prison system returned to the community with minimal transitional support and supervision. There was clearly a need to change old approaches to transitioning individuals from prison back into the community. CSOSA took the lead in implementing an innovative program to reduce crime and enhance public safety through close supervision of offenders, swift and certain responses to violations, appropriate treatment, support services, and effective partnerships with the community, the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and other agencies.

Before initiating the re-entry system, CSOSA conducted an intensive process of collecting data on the offender population to gain a clearer understanding of who was being released into the community. The data revealed that most DC parolees lacked the basic skills to successfully negotiate their environment, were unemployed or unemployable, lacked basic literacy skills, and had substance abuse problems. The re-entry system was designed to provide an array of services, including drug testing, substance abuse treatment, life skills training, housing assistance, and job training and referral services to meet the needs of offenders making the passage from prison to the community.

CSOSA's Re-entry System has three phases:

(Phase 1) transitional services, (Phase 2) enhanced supervision and community reintegration and (Phase 3) relapse/recidivism prevention and restitution.

During Phase 1, offenders are placed in highly structured community transitional centers for a 30 to 120 day period. During the first fourteen days of this phase, the offender is not allowed to leave the center. CSOSA's Transitional Intervention for Parole Supervision (TIPS) team conducts comprehensive risk and needs assessments to guide the level of supervision, the type and intensity of drug testing and treatment, and the required support services. Offenders enter into performance contracts with CSOSA. These contracts are supported by an individually tailored supervision and intervention plan and accountability structure, much like the contracts used for Drug Courts. This phase of re-entry enables the offender to develop essential supportive relationships in the community.

Through enhanced supervision, during Phase 2, which lasts a minimum of six months, the offender is prepared to reintegrate into the community. Structured prosocial activities such as community service are performed and the offender is introduced to a quality supervision team comprised of CSOs specializing in anger management, criminality, life skills training, and addiction counseling, among other services.

A restorative justice component has been infused into CSOSA's Re-entry System through memoranda of understanding with the DC Departments of Public Works and Consumer and Regulatory Affairs to provide meaningful opportunities for offenders to participate in community service projects. Re-entry teams comprised of community members, family, criminal justice professionals, treatment providers, and mentors are developed to support and assist the offender during the re-entry period.

Phase 3 will last a minimum of six months with the aim of helping the offender become more independent in the community and ensuring that a firm and sustaining support system is in place to help the offender resist illegal activities.

[Pilot Launched with Education Component](#)

During the Spring of 2000, CSOSA implemented its re-entry pilot project in the 6th Police District. CSOSA and the MPD have already established

several successful community justice partnerships to increase the accountability of offenders who reside in that community.

The centerpiece of CSOSA's first re-entry project is the Learning Lab located at St. Luke's Center. Grant funding allowed CSOSA to purchase computer equipment and to hire specialists who provide educational, vocational, employment training and other assistance to prepare offenders for jobs with upward mobility.

Collaborations between Fannie Mae and the Urban Institute may create opportunities for CSOSA to access affordable housing for re-entry offenders. In addition, the Clark Construction Company and other private sector employers have pledged their support for the re-entry system by offering jobs to qualified ex-offenders.

In the future, CSOSA plans to expand its re-entry system District-wide. We are truly encouraged by the President's support for Re-entry initiatives and the recently introduced legislation that would authorize \$23 million, over a five-year period, to buttress CSOSA's re-entry efforts. Meanwhile, we strongly urge the citizens of the District to join CSOSA's community justice advisory networks to become a partner as we endeavor to improve public safety in the District of Columbia. As CSOSA fulfills its pledge to reduce recidivism by the offenders under its supervision by 50 percent over the next five years, working together we will substantiate that Re-entry matters in the District of Columbia.

For more information, contact the CSOSA at 202-220-5343.

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